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SUBJECT: TFH01: AMERICASBAROMETER ARTICLE ON PREDICTING
COUPS

¶1. (U) Summary: In the latest "AmericasBarometer Insights" article, public opinion researchers Mitchell Seligson and John Booth point to their conclusion in a book published earlier this year that Honduras demonstrated "greater risk for unrest, political turmoil, and support for antidemocratic regimes than (did) other countries." Seligson and Booth came to this conclusion based on an index of three public opinion dimensions: support for democracy, support for national institutions, and evaluation of the government's economic performance. Based on these indicators, Booth and Seligson project that Haiti, Guatemala, Peru, and Ecuador are at most risk for political instability; Uruguay, Colombia, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic are least at risk. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Background: Seligson directs the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), which includes the AmericasBarometer, covering 24 countries and over 40,000 interviews in 2008. The project has received significant funding from USAID, though it maintains editorial independence. Seligson and Booth are authors of the article "Predicting Coups? Democratic Vulnerabilities, TheAmericasBarometer and the 2009 Honduran Crisis" and the book "The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America: Democracy and Political Support in Eight Nations" published earlier this year. The article is part of the LAPOP "Insights" series and can be found on www.AmericasBarometer.org. End Background.

¶3. (U) In the book published earlier this year, using data from the 2004 AmericasBarometer, Seligson and Booth found that political legitimacy in Honduras was "very thin." They had created an index based on the ratio of citizens that were "triply dissatisfied" versus those who were "triply satisfied" in three key dimensions: support for democracy, support for national institutions, and evaluation of the government's economic performance. The ratio in 2004 was 1.57 for Honduras; as compared with 0.08 for Costa Rica. Seligson and Booth also note a separate indicator that 56.2 percent of the voting age population in Honduras would have justified a coup in 2004; the highest of their eight-country sample.

¶4. (U) Turning to 2008 data in their "Insights Article," Seligson and Booth show that in Honduras the ratio of "triply dissatisfied" versus "triply satisfied" almost quadrupled (from 1.57 in 2004 to 6.17 in 2008) over four years. The results "clearly indicate a substantially increased risk of instability." They note that the "index

does not predict the specific events that occurred in June 2009 in Honduras, but it does suggest a climate vulnerable to democratic breakdown." The authors note that Haiti, Guatemala, and Peru are also at increased risk based on this indicator.

15. (SBU) Comment: Seligson and Booth provide one example of many indicators that could be used to predict a "climate vulnerable to democratic breakdown," and Embassy would recommend caution in the use of this particular index. The "triply satisfied" vs. "triply dissatisfied" ratio could potentially be seen as arbitrary; other indicators (e.g. analysis of separation/balance of power, overall economic performance, public support for coups in general) may be more useful. However, a more robust analysis of factors that contribute to democratic vulnerabilities may prove helpful to those working to enhance long-term democratic sustainability in the region. End Comment.
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